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A CONCEPTUAL AND MEASUREMENT MODEL FOR NORMS AND ROLES

JAY JACKSON

A REPORT OF RESEARCH  
SUPPORTED BY  
MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT GRANTS  
OM-306 AND OM-307  
FROM THE  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH  
U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

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COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF MENTAL HOSPITAL ORGANIZATION  
THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS  
FEBRUARY, 1963

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⑨ Research rept. on COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF MENTAL HOSPITAL ORGANIZATION,  
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⑦ FEBRUARY 1963, ⑩ 60p. incl. illus. 57 refs. ⑪ NA

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# A CONCEPTUAL AND MEASUREMENT MODEL FOR NORMS AND ROLES<sup>1</sup>

Jay Jackson

The University of Kansas

## INTRODUCTION

Role theory has been developing at two levels, in connection with two separate problem areas, socialization and the development of the self, and the organization of systems of action, or social systems. ~~My own~~ *this* research ~~has been~~ *is* concerned almost entirely with the second of these problems, although it may have some implications for the first one. In the process of attempting to conceptualize and to measure norms and roles in a number of field studies over the past ten years, a way of thinking systematically about these elusive concepts and a method of obtaining data that follows from this approach have emerged, called the Return Potential Model. ~~(Jackson 1960)~~ *S*

The first part of this chapter will be concerned with problems of definition in role theory and the possibilities of having a real theory *are discussed*. *A* *is* ~~the~~ model ~~will be~~ described and some examples of measurement operations *are* ~~will be~~ provided to illustrate its use in research. The assumptions adopted in the formulation of this approach ~~will~~ *are* then ~~be~~ explored *in* relation to a number of existing generalizations in role theory. The second part of the chapter will discuss *some* selected problems of role theory in the broader context of social psychology, *are discussed* as they have been investigated using the model, or as they might be pursued with it.

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<sup>1</sup>The theorizing in this chapter owes many more intellectual debts to teachers and colleagues than can be acknowledged in the references. I especially wish to thank, but not to blame, Professors Robert Macleod, Theodore Newcomb, Muzaffer Sherif, and Dorwin Cartwright.

## DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR NORMS AND ROLES

### Role Theory and Problems of Definition

#### The Function of Role as a Concept

According to Sarbin (1954), role theory addresses itself to the investigation of structure within the organism, structure within the environment, and their interaction. Some qualification and restriction surely must be placed upon this broad purpose, since it seems to encompass most of the aims of social and behavioral science.

We need some way of describing or accounting for the organization of behavior. A single individual's behavior becomes organized, according to Hebb (1949), by means of an equilibrating neurological system. The problem has been to find a way of handling the organization of multi-person systems without denying the existence of central symbolic processes, such as thought, consciousness, and intentionality. Some early social psychologists maintained that they could account for group and institutional phenomena in terms of individual behavior theory (Allport 1924, 1933; Dashiell 1930) or reinforcement theory (Miller and Dollard 1941). More recent cognitive theorists recognize the issue but do not solve it, since they deal only with a perceptual organization, in the phenomenal world of a single person (Asch 1959; Heider 1958). In his attempt to treat this problem of combining subjectivities, Lewin (1947) did not succeed: he could find no way of merging the life spaces of a husband and a wife in interaction, but introduced a third so-called objective space -- actually the life space of the investigator -- and moved back and forth among the three.

It seems unlikely that it is going to be possible to handle this problem within any of the present conceptual schemes of individual psychology.

Lindesmith and Strauss (1956) distinguish between two bodies of thinking that employ the concept role for different purposes. Some social psychologists, after G. H. Mead (1934), are concerned with the socialization of the individual, or more correctly, the individualization of the social. The institutionalists are concerned with the integration of individual activities into a social system or society. Both types of role theory, however, utilize the concept to account for the organization at the conceptual or symbolic level of the reciprocal behavior of two or more persons.

#### Two "Theories" or One?

A major distinction between the two bodies of role theory, pointed out by a number of writers, involves what Coutu (1951) calls role taking and role playing. He refers to the former as a psychological concept and to the latter as sociological. Perhaps this is not a bad distinction, since it points to role taking's involvement in the process of the development of a social self, and to role playing's relation to social system function and integration. One could say, though, that they are both sociological but at different levels of conceptualization; in any case, the distinction is significant, whatever the disciplinary proprietorship. Those writers who recognize the difference agree that role taking is an integral part of playing a role in any social system, since it is involved in all symbolic communication.

Ideally, one would like to place these two rather different but related conceptions upon a continuum, and to have one body of role theory, such as it is, rather than two. One could then think of two persons in interaction as the lower limit of a social system, with the upper limit being the formal organization, or society. There are some problems, however, in attempting to do this. One needs to be careful not to produce merely a verbal rather than a conceptual solution to the problem.

It seems to be useful to accept the traditional conception that role always refers to some position; and that position is a locus in a system of loci, defined with respect to a specified criterion. Thus, it is possible to speak of a communication system, an authority system, and a status system. Each is a structure of positions, with each position defined in terms of its relations to all of the others. When a position's relations to other positions have been specified in terms of the communication, authority, work, status, prestige, affection, and other structures, then that position has been defined in the total social system. Thus, role must refer to a position, itself defined in terms of some system of positions.

When role is utilized to describe and to explore processes of communication and symbolic interaction, however, the positions and defining systems of positions are not made explicit. One of the problems of combining conceptually the two different bodies of role theory, therefore, is the identification of co-ordinate positions in a structure of positions when persons are said to be taking roles. It may be useful to distinguish between stable and transient

systems of interaction, with the latter being those in which the relations have not yet become stabilized and normatively regulated -- as in a new group or an informal conversation. Before progress can be made, however, in determining the range of phenomena that can be encompassed by one consistent and coherent body of role theory, we shall have to be considerably more explicit about the definition of and the assumptions surrounding the concept role.

#### Possibilities of Having a Real Theory

One does not have to belabor the point that what is called role theory today is not really a theory, in any formal sense. What Strauss (1956) said about Mead's social psychology applies reasonably well to role theory in general: it is only an "abstract frame of reference," ..... "a rich source of ideas." Those who have tried to test hypotheses taken directly from Mead's ideas, or from other writers in this area, generally have suffered frustration. It is highly unlikely, in fact, that we are ready to have a real theory of role at the present time, for a number of reasons.

I do not believe that scientific inquiry begins with hypotheses or testable propositions. As Northrop (1947) has pointed out, the scientist is set into motion by a problematic situation -- what Festinger (1957) would call a cognitive dissonance -- in the scientist's mind. Prior to this there must be a Baconian phase of sheer empiricism, of getting to know the phenomena. Soon there must be developed, however, some systematic way of coming to grips with the phenomena; for as Popper (1959) has stated, "the advance of science is not due to the fact that more and more perceptual experiences accumulate in the course of time. Nor is it due to the fact that we

are making ever better use of our senses". There must be some data-collecting model that corresponds to a tentative conceptual model of the phenomena, so that coordinations back and forth between data and ideas can be consistent and meaningful.

This stage represents about where I am in working with the Return Potential Model. It is certainly not a formal model and does not pretend to be a theory. Before we can develop a role theory that will generate testable propositions, problematic situations, or "bold conjectures", however, I believe that some such systematic groundwork is necessary.

#### Return Potential Model and Theoretical Rationale

##### Reasons For Having a Model

One cannot escape having a theoretical model, either explicitly or implicitly. If the concept role is to be used in research, clearly one must have a way of identifying or measuring it. As soon as this is done, assumptions are introduced about the conceptual nature of what is being measured; and sometimes a whole theoretical or philosophical position implicitly has been adopted. Thus, even if the investigator does not claim any universality for his theoretical conception, or is unprepared to wage intellectual warfare against those who prefer alternative formulations, he has some responsibility for making explicit, at least to himself, the basis for his choice of particular methods of data collection and analysis.

One of the characteristics of theorizing about role that has made research difficult is the lack of deductive possibilities, of logical fruitfulness. Hypotheses cannot be derived from a concept, as we all



know; even though some authors write as if this can or should be done. In reading the body of rich and thoughtful work on role theory, one is struck by the fact that processes are being described, but the concepts utilized are thing-concepts: such as role, role expectation, and role enactment. The problem in conducting research on role phenomena is to find some simple model that will yield a number of logically related definitions, so that one can begin to formulate and to investigate propositions that describe the processes, within a coherent framework. It is desirable, too, to have definitions that can be measured as variables. This seems to be one of the major directions we have been taking in social psychology: although we begin with thing-concepts, such as self, group, and norm, we move toward qualitative or relational concepts, such as ego-involvement or ego integration, quality and degree of group membership or person-group relations (Jackson 1959), and norm-ness, or the degree and characteristics of normative regulation (Jackson 1962).

The Return Potential Model is one attempt to satisfy these criteria in thinking about and measuring norms, roles, and their related processes. How adequate it is depends upon what can be accomplished with it: to what degree it can encompass existing empirical findings and generalizations, and more important, whether it suggests some new questions or directions for inquiry.

#### Definitional Requirements

After reviewing implicit and explicit definitions of role, and also in attempting to synthesize observations of phenomena that seem to require some such concept, certain definitional requirements become

manifest. Role has been defined by Sarbin (1954) as a unit of culture. Culture is not something concrete, but a system of patterned ideas, even if they are partially manifested in concrete forms. If role is to be defined as a unit of culture, then, it must be an abstract pattern of ideas that is learned by the members of a social system. This makes of role a cognitive construct in the mind of an Actor -- just another opinion or attitude, even if shared. How can such an individual attribute be used to account for the symbolic organization of multi-person systems?

A number of writers (Linton 1945; Newcomb 1950; Coutu 1951) define role in terms of what a person is supposed to do in a certain situation because of his position. This sounds as if role is defined as a pattern of behavior, and has been interpreted that way. Even though these theorists emphasize that roles are always reciprocal, and that an Actor's role is interdependent with those of all the Others in the social system, we are left with the problem of organization. If role be defined as an individual's ideal behavior determined by his position and the situation, how does his behavior become interdependent with that of other persons? How do roles become reciprocal? Should the problem of organization of behavior in a social system be relegated to the cultural system and its organization, or to the personality system and its organization, or are there organizing processes in any system of interaction, as Parsons (1951) insists, which should be implicit in our concept of role? It appears, therefore, that one requirement for a definition of role is that it be an interactional or supra-personal concept rather than a concept from individual psychology, whether attitude or behavior.

A more careful reading of the role theorists above suggests that they actually define role, not as behavior, but in terms of prescriptions for behavior. Both the prescriptions and the behavior are required; perhaps an adequate definition would be the distribution of prescriptions by Others for the total range of an Actor's behavior in a defined situation. Thus, Linton (1945) says that "All societies devote a great deal of time and energy to training their younger members in what they should do under various hypothetical conditions". The use of "should" implies approval for compliance and disapproval for non-compliance. The term "do" clearly refers to behavior which must have a range of alternatives, at least one of which is approved more than others. The reference to "hypothetical conditions" stresses the fact that the definition of the situation must be considered.

Since behavior is multidimensional, however, I have been led to define role in terms of norms, which I see as the unit components of a role. In a later section some of the problems involved in thus defining role as a norm-system will be considered.

#### A Model for Norms and Roles

The Return Potential Model represents a definition of norm in terms of the distribution of potential approval and disapproval by Others for various alternatives along one continuum of Actor's behavior under specified conditions, that is, in a given defined situation.

In Figure 1, the model is seen to have two orthogonal dimensions, a behavior dimension represented along the abscissa, and a return dimension represented along the ordinate. A return potential curve has been drawn to illustrate a hypothetical distribution of potential

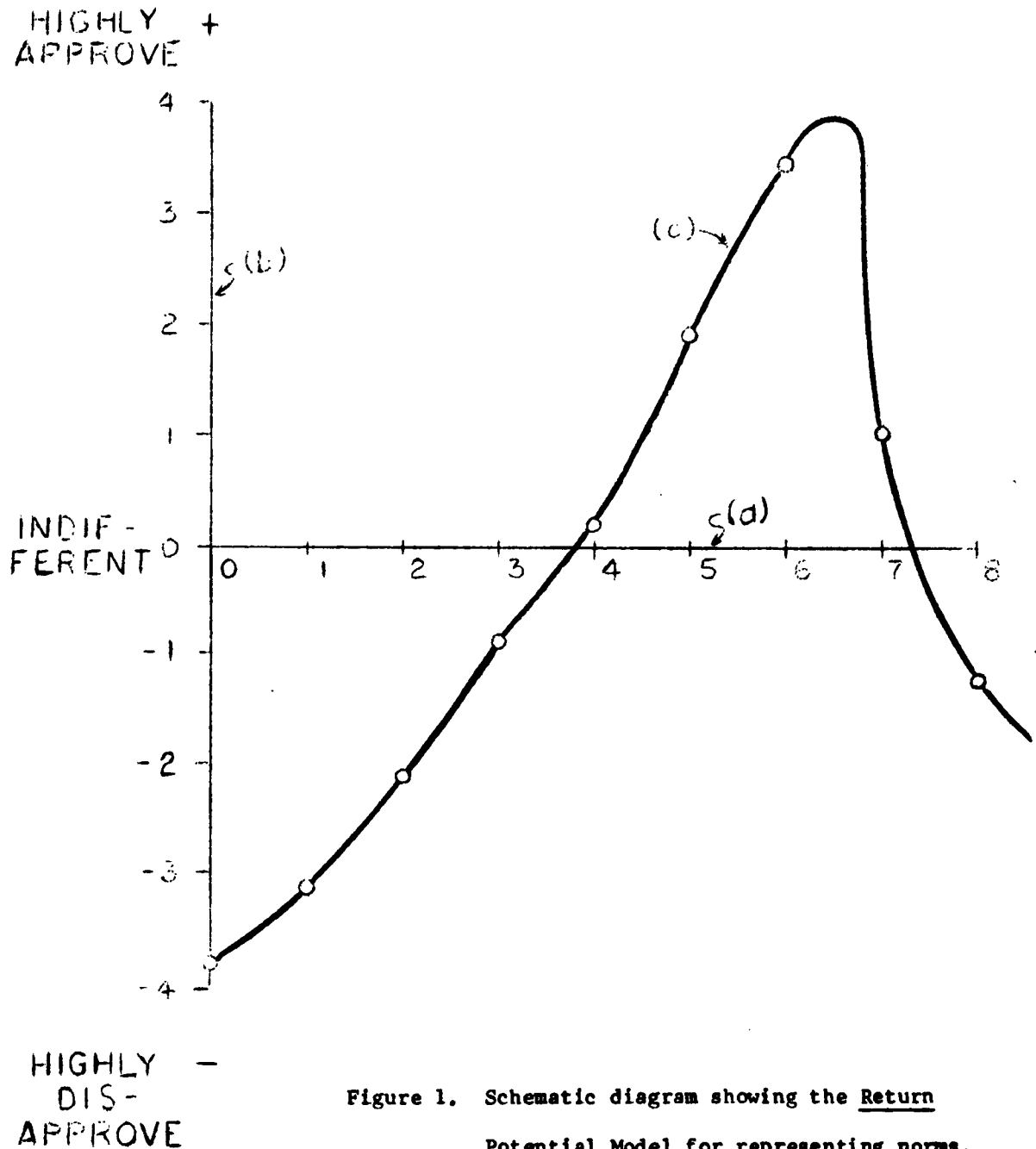


Figure 1. Schematic diagram showing the Return Potential Model for representing norms. (a) A behavior dimension; (b) a return dimension; (c) A Return Potential Curve, showing the distribution of approval-disapproval among the members of a system over the whole range of behavior.

approval-disapproval, or return, for a particular behavior dimension in a defined situation. The curve plots at each point on the behavior dimension the return an Actor potentially could receive if he produced that specific behavior. The return is only potential rather than actual, since the model attempts to represent the potentialities of an interaction situation before the behavior occurs. The basic paradigm assumed for any interaction situation involves a person confronted with various alternative acts for any particular dimension of his behavior, each of which has a potentiality of eliciting a certain value of return -- either approval, indifference, or disapproval-- from the relevant other persons.

The point of maximum potential return, or highest point on the curve, represents the ideal behavior prescribed by the members of the social system. This commonly is considered to be a norm, although it is preferable to think of the entire return potential curve as the norm, since it represents the total range of both prescriptions and proscriptions. There are some problems involved in this conception, however, since a curve with certain structural characteristics, to be discussed later, suggests that a norm does not exist for a particular behavior, situation, and set of interacting persons. The model implies, therefore, that we must think in terms of degrees of norm-ness, or the process of normative regulation, rather than in terms of norm as a thing. This makes it possible in research, however, to investigate whether, in what form, and to what degree norms "exist," instead of taking them for granted.

Data are obtained to fit the model, from which the return potential curve can be drawn and other indices calculated, utilizing a questionnaire method which has become progressively more simple since its first use (Jackson 1953, 1956, 1956a, 1960a). The respondent is provided with a 9-point scale of approval-disapproval which ranges from Approve Highly at one extreme to Disapprove Highly at the other. He is also given a brief hypothetical situation to read, that involves a specific Actor from the same social system as the respondent. The Actor can be either a position, such as Charge Attendant, or a group, such as the Administrative Committee. The following are two examples of such situations, from a study of authority relations in mental hospitals (Jackson 1960a):

The Business Manager learns that the hospital can save a great deal of money by purchasing uniform pajamas and work clothes for the patients.

A particular patient whose wife is visiting him asks his Staff Psychiatrist if he can go home with her on a three-day leave.

Since in this study we were interested in norms about the use of authority, the same behavior dimension could be utilized for all of the 59 situations investigated. It represents a continuum of authoritative behavior (Jackson 1962a), with each of the six alternatives being an increasingly more authoritative act. The respondent is asked to rate each act on the approval-disapproval scale. Instructions are as follows:

How would you feel if the person (in the red box) did each of the following? (Use the Approval-Disapproval Scale on the inside front cover of the List of Situations. Write a number, indicating how much you would approve or disapprove the person's behavior, in each of the spaces below.) (Jackson 1960a)

In order to avoid misunderstanding in situations involving more than one person, the Actor was always marked with a red box.

It was possible to use this questionnaire for all levels of personnel, from attendants to superintendents, in four state mental hospitals. The average time for obtaining data on norms for authoritative behavior in 42 situations was about one hour for each respondent. A similar questionnaire dealing with policy and administrative situations was administered only to upper echelon personnel.

Since the purpose of this chapter is not to report research findings, we shall go on to a discussion of some of the assumptions implicit in the Return Potential Model, and some of the characteristics of norms that can be derived from it. As the opportunity arises, however, illustrations will be offered from studies that have used the approach. The operational definitions that have been used for particular ideas will be discussed, thus underlining that the conceptual model has been coordinated to a measurement model.

#### Assumptions of the Model

When an area of thinking has become as overgrown with the weeds of incomplete conceptualization as that of role theory, any attempt to cut a path through the tangle must resolve many issues or quasi-issues by making assumptions or "informed guesses". In this section a number of these assumptions are discussed.

1. Two meanings of expectation

The function of the return dimension in the model is to represent what Parsons (1951) calls "role expectations". He says that the expectations of alter can constitute sanctions for ego, which is just what is inherent in the model. Of the two different meanings of expectation found in role theory, prediction and prescription, only the latter is intended. What has been assumed here is consistent with the previously stated function of the concept role: to handle the problem of symbolic organization of social systems. Organization involves interdependence. Prediction of another person's behavior, as an non-evaluative, intrapersonal event -- that is, an individual cognition -- is assumed to be irrelevant to the problem of organization.

A person can make predictions about another's behavior without demanding that this behavior occur, or caring whether or not it does. The significant question appears to be, how much is Other's activity dependent upon Actor's performance? To the degree that this dependence exists, then Other will not be able to fulfill the demands made upon him, in his position, unless Actor produces the expected behavior. Other will not content himself with making predictions in a situation of dependence or interdependence; he will not be affectively neutral. If the behaviors are not interdependent, however, predictions will not become prescriptions. We do not require complete predictability in others -- in fact it's rather boring -- but only sufficient predictability to permit us to play our own roles adequately.

What is required, therefore, is a measure of how much Others care whether or not a particular act is produced by Actor in a given



situation. Only in this sense of prescription is the idea of expectation represented in the Return Potential Model.

## 2. Definition of the situation

In identifying a particular behavior dimension when utilizing the model, one must also specify a situation. Why is this necessary? Lindesmith and Strauss (1956) point out that role playing occurs in episodes or scenes, which differ in their significance. Different situations have different "definitions". One possible interpretation of this statement is that situations invoke and involve differentially the values and goals of the social system. Thus, the meaning or definition of a situation, which determines what norms will develop, and which subsequently is incorporated in those norms, depends upon the significance of the sequence of interaction for the larger social system.

A particular act may have implications for the social structure on many different dimensions simultaneously; it may affect, for example, authority relations, work relations, and status relations. In utilizing the model in research, therefore, one cannot make any situation too general or global.

Two different methods have been utilized for specifying the behavior dimension and defining the situations. One has been illustrated previously. When the research objective is to explore a particular dimension of the social structure, as in the study of authority relations referred to, the behavior dimension can be standardized, and a different hypothetical situation used in each item of the questionnaire. When the purpose is to investigate a particular role in its

entirety, on many dimensions of social structure, then each item can utilize a different behavior dimension, stated so that, in conjunction with the hypothetical action situation provided, the definition of the situation is made explicit.

An example from a study of the role of a female white-collar worker, called a "service representative", in a telephone company commercial office (Jackson 1956a), should help to clarify the latter approach. The behavior dimension was specified differently for each item, by asking a particular question and providing multiple alternative answers representing steps along a continuum. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they would approve or disapprove each step on the behavior dimension, if this were a service representative's typical behavior. In one item the question was: "Does she conform to the allotted periods for relief and lunch?" The hypothetical alternatives, each of which had to be rated on the approval-disapproval scale, ranged from "She hardly ever overstays the allotted time," to "She almost always overstays the allotted time." It would appear that in this example the phrasing of the question and the behavior dimension provided a sufficiently restricted definition of the situation.

### 3. Quality-performance distinction

Another issue involving the behavior dimension is the distinction between the performance and the quality aspects of a role, emphasized in Sarbin's (1954) discussion of role theory. His useage appears to be different from Parsons' (1951), who is referring to whether Other relates to Actor as a bundle of qualities -- in terms of ascribed

attributes such as ethnic group membership or social class position -- or as a bundle of performances -- in terms of his achievement or behavior in the action situation. In this sense, the Return Potential Model deals only with performances and Others' tendencies to approve or disapprove them.

The assumption is made, however, that quality and performance as discussed by Sarbin are two different ways of referring to the same event. We can describe a clerk as an accurate worker, for example, or we can describe the types and seriousness of the errors she makes. The former is a qualitative attribution, the latter refers to performance. The behavior dimension can be phrased either way, since it is assumed that the investigator is not interested in idiosyncratic performance, but typical performance seen as a "quality" of the performer.

#### 4. Rights and duties

Position and role often are defined in the literature as a collection of rights and duties. What does this mean, and how is the meaning represented in the model under consideration? If an Actor has a right to behave in a particular way, then Others will be inclined to accept his behavior. This implies that they will not disapprove, but it says nothing about how much they will approve. It is likely that a person's right, or legitimate behavior, will be minimally approved but not disapproved. We should find, however, that the gradient of disapproval on the return potential curve becomes very steep once the point of legitimacy is exceeded on the behavior dimension. This type of norm is represented by Curve A in Figure 2.

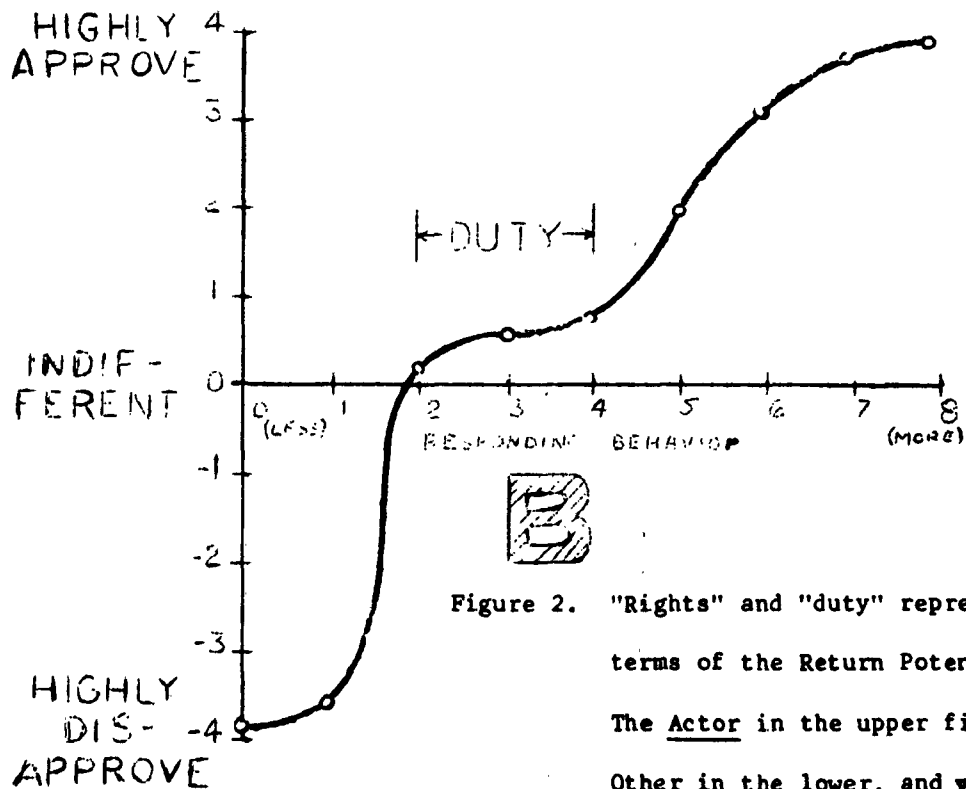
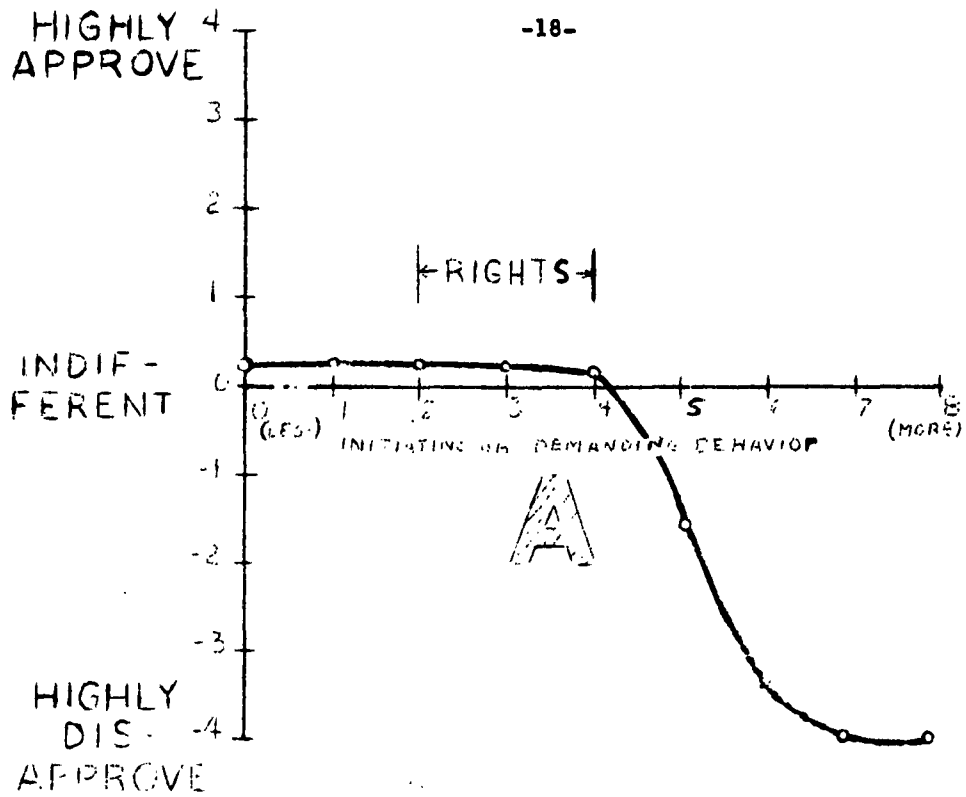


Figure 2. "Rights" and "duty" represented in terms of the Return Potential Model. The Actor in the upper figure is the Other in the lower, and vice versa, illustrating the reciprocity of role relations.

If an act is a person's duty, however, there might be considerable approval for its commission, and high approval for behaving beyond the requirements of duty, but clearly there will be strong disapproval in most situations for omission of the behavior. Such a norm might be represented by Curve B in Figure 2.

The terms rights and duties are thing-concepts rather than process concepts; they are not suitable for representing an action situation in which Others have feelings of approval and disapproval that are not confined to the maximum of what the Actor is permitted, or the minimum of what is demanded of him. Thus, the Return Potential Model represents these concepts in terms of expectations for behavior, but goes beyond them to represent the total field of potential forces.

#### 5. Formal and informal organization

There is an assumption made when rights and duties are defined in terms of the feelings of approval and disapproval of members of a social system. The traditional distinction between formal and informal organization is ignored. In our research on organizations we have been aware, obviously, that rules, orders, and standardized procedures exist; but also aware that they might signify any degree of consensus or commitment. The model assumes that what is significant in regulating Actor's behavior is represented at the level of response tendencies in the Others of the system. If formal prescriptions for behavior are accepted by members of a system, they will be represented at this level. There can be all shades of blending of formal and informal. The formal norms and roles are thus seen to be located in a cultural system, which can vary greatly in the degree to which it impinges upon the system of action, or social system.

It has been possible to utilize the model to investigate discrepancies between formal and informal organization, by comparing empirical return potential curves with the written rules and procedures of an organization. A number of different questions can be asked in regard to this problem, such as: "Do the curves for the top administrative group correspond more closely to the formal prescriptions than do those of groups at lower echelons? Do you find greater correspondence as you ascend levels in a hierarchy?" These are some of the questions under investigation in our current study of norms about authoritative behavior in a mental hospital system.

#### Derivable Characteristics of the Model

A number of different parameters of the model have proved to be interesting in their own right. They have suggested a family of related structural characteristics of norms. These have been discussed elsewhere (Jackson 1960), but since they appear to have implications for role theory, or to be required for the discussion of combining component norms into a norm-system, or role, they will be mentioned briefly here.

##### 1. Point of maximum return

Each position on a behavior dimension yields a distribution of responses from the members of a social system for any defined situation. The means of these distributions are utilized to plot the return potential curve. The point of maximum return, as mentioned previously, corresponds to "ideal behavior", one of the most frequent uses of the term norm. It has been found that an index expressing the value of this characteristic of norms for the exercise of authority

distinguishes significantly among different mental hospitals, different role groups within the hospitals, different categories of situations or functional areas, and different Actors in those situations (Jackson 1962b).

## 2. Range of tolerable behavior

Some time ago, Sherif pointed out that a norm was more than a single value of behavior, but should be thought of as a range of tolerable behavior (Sherif 1956). This corresponds in the present model to that segment of the behavior dimension that is approved by the members of a social system. Although recognizing the validity of the conception, we have found it difficult to utilize in research except for descriptive purposes. A number of measures of this concept have been tried, such as the physical length of the segment of the behavior dimension, the proportion of the total range of behavior that is approved, or the area under the curve that is approved. All of them offer difficulties of measurement and statistical treatment, since they are dependent upon the scale units and range of the two dimensions of the model.

## 3. Intensity

One approach to determining the intensity of normative regulation of behavior in a defined situation is to discover how much the members of the social system care, how strongly they feel about alternative possibilities for behavior. This comes rather close to an answer to the question, "To what degree does a norm exist in the system?" although, as we shall see, it ignores the question of consensus.

A measure of intensity is obtained from the model by utilizing the mean height of the return potential curve from its point of indifference, without regard to direction. This index represents the strength of expectations for behavior, regardless of whether they are approving or disapproving. Striking differences have appeared in this measure when used to compare different institutions across a whole range of situations; which suggests that some social systems have a higher degree of normative regulation than others (Jackson 1962b). Intensity also is being utilized to investigate the relative importance for a system of different problem areas within a single institution.

#### 4. Potential return difference

One of the most interesting and perhaps potentially most useful characteristics of a norm is obtained by considering separately two different components of intensity, positive and negative. The difference between these is called the potential return difference, or PRD. This index is calculated by summing all of the positive ordinates of the return potential curve, where it represents potential approval, and subtracting the sum of the negative ordinates, where the curve represents potential disapproval. Thus, PRD can take either a positive or a negative value. The measure provides a conceptual tool for investigating the process of social control in a social system -- whether relatively more emphasis is placed upon reward or punishment. The concept also seems to have some promise for describing some of the rather nebulous "atmospheric" variables



that appear in the literature of social science. Positive indices across many different situations that are normatively regulated might suggest a generally supportive climate; corresponding negative indices might suggest a punitive or threatening environment.

PRD also may afford some possibilities for articulating role theory with other bodies of theory that have made systematic distinctions between reward motivation and punishment motivation, such as learning theory, level of aspiration theory with its distinction between approach and avoidance motives (Lewin et al. 1944), the motivational theory of McClelland and Atkinson with its concepts of need for achievement (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell 1953) and fear of failure (Atkinson & Litwin 1960), and French & Raven's (1959) theory of types of power relations.

##### 5. Crystallization

At the core of much of the theorizing about social systems and the processes of organization, integration, and normative regulation, is the problem of consensus. It seems to be essential to the development of role theory to be able to represent the amount of agreement involved in what we call norms and roles; and to have a method for investigating systematically a whole series of related questions in this area.

The Return Potential Model lends itself readily to this task. The crystallization of a norm is defined as the mean discrepancy in expectations between all pairs of persons in a social system. It is measured by Cronbach's (1953) distance function,  $D^2$ , which involves summing the variances over the return potential curve. Unfortunately,

this statistic is only a descriptive measure and must be treated with non-parametric methods, since its sampling distribution is not known. We have found it preferable, however, to an alternative treatment of the data involving Kendall's  $W$  (Siegel 1956) for the ranked positions on the behavior dimension. More refined methods of treatment are presently being explored.

If we think in terms of the degree of normative regulation -- that is, utilize the concept norm as a variable rather than as a constant -- the index of crystallization suggests itself for this purpose. High crystallization (a low index) signifies a great deal of consensus, and low crystallization indicates an absence of consensus. The members of a social system may agree, however, in their indifference. In fact, the highest amount of consensus ordinarily will exist where behavior is seen to be idiosyncratic or personal, and not significant for the system. In the investigation of norms and roles, of course, such a finding might be exceedingly important. It suggests, however, that more than the concept crystallization is required to measure the degree to which a norm "exists". A combination of high intensity and high crystallization, however, would seem to be an adequate indication: the members of the system would feel strongly about the behavior in question, and would be in agreement about their feelings. The various combinations of crystallization and intensity each suggests a different state of normative regulation.

There is an indication from the study of norms about authority (Jackson 1962b) that -- in some hospitals at least -- crystallization and intensity are negatively related. It suggests that where the members of a system have high consensus about authority relations they do not feel so strongly about them. When, however, they are in conflict about how authoritatively particular Actors ought to behave in various situations, their feelings are strong.

The major objective in the above study is to investigate relationships between the authority structure and characteristics of the treatment environments. It has been encouraging to find that the structural characteristics of norms discussed in this section discriminate reliably among hospitals, among role groups, and among different functional areas of problems.

### Role Theory and the Return Potential Model

#### From Norms to Roles

The Return Potential Model is used to represent and to measure norms, which are conceived to be the unit components of a role. The exceedingly complicated problem of going from norms to roles -- of the selection and combination of norms into what is called a role -- will probably not receive a satisfactory solution before a great deal of systematic empirical work has been performed. A number of different aspects of this question will be considered in this section.

One of the difficult problems in constructing the norm-system is to determine which are the significant behavior dimensions, of all the possible ones that could be included. It may not be possible, but it would be highly desirable, to define any particular role in terms of a finite set of return potential curves and specified sets of Others. At the present time, in those studies that have been done, it appears that either we attempt to be exhaustive, or we select an intuitive -- a very random -- "sample" of behavior dimensions. There are at least two possible approaches to the problem that are more systematic, what might be called the deductive and the inductive approach.

1. The deductive approach

One begins with an ideal type or model of a social system, such as Weber's (1952) analysis of roles in a bureaucracy, or Aberle and his colleagues' (1950) statement of what they consider to be the functional prerequisites of a society. One can then derive from this model the behaviors-in-situation that would be required, and can construct behavior dimensions. This would be an interesting approach and well worth attempting. The obvious difficulty is that one's empirical findings about roles would depend upon the specific model of a social system adopted.

2. The inductive approach

One begins with periods of observation and interviewing to attain a broad range of information regarding the activities, relations, and feelings of the members of the social system with respect to the particular position in question. The next step involves the employment of the Return Potential Model. It requires the construction of

an extensive set of questionnaire items, each one specifying a particular behavior dimension and situation. On the basis, then, of measures of intensity and crystallization, it should be possible to determine that some activities are more normatively regulated than others. It is not clear, however, whether or not intensity alone should be the criterion for inclusion of a behavior dimension. Perhaps it should suffice that Others feel strongly about what an Actor does, even if they are not in agreement?

This approach is similar to Newcomb's (1950) when he discusses what he would do to determine the content of a mother's role. He distinguished first between necessary and optional behaviors, and suggested an arbitrary criterion, such as 50% of the informants feeling that a particular behavior was necessary. The method suggested here might provide somewhat more precise criteria for performing essentially the same task.

The difficulties with any inductive approach, however, are characteristic: different investigators, no matter how lengthy their exploratory observations, undoubtedly would include some different items in their final measure of "role". The cut-off points for inclusion or exclusion of an item, based upon the structural characteristics of its curve, would be arbitrary. This becomes, then, an empirical question, as with any operational definition: the ultimate test must be, does it provide clearer, stronger, and more general findings than some other operation?

Although the problem of selecting and combining a specific set of norms into a norm-system is far from solved, the model does provide some tools for making a beginning. Ultimately one would hope to attain fairly standard definitions and operations for studying particular roles in various social systems.

In the second part of this chapter, a number of problems of role theory will be discussed, with reference to how they have been, or might be formulated as researchable questions in terms of the Return Potential Model.

#### SOME PROBLEMS OF ROLE THEORY

The literature of role theory contains a great many hypotheses that cannot be tested with any precision, since their terms and referents are either unclear or ambiguous. Yet, one cannot shrug off as meaningless the generalizations of some of the most sensitive observers and cogent thinkers in social science. The difficulty is, rather, that most of the hypothetical statements in role theory are too meaningful. They often encompass whole families of predictions, each of which requires individual specification and qualification. Thus, although many of the extant hypotheses intuitively seem to be generally true, they need to be formulated more precisely within a coherent theoretical language that can be coordinated to specific operational definitions. This will permit systematic testing of hypotheses and building of empirical theory.

### Typical Hypotheses of Role Theory

A typical hypothesis, stemming from Mead, is that a child must develop role taking ability and a generalized other, before he can play an adult role (Lindesmith & Strauss 1956). Another statement from the same authors says that organized group activity requires a minimum of consensus and a process of achieving objectivity. Carter (1944) refers to the adolescent's occupational role as being indefinite and diffuse (quoted by Sarbin 1954). Cottrell (1952) has a hypothesis that states that adjustment to age-sex roles depends upon the clarity with which they are defined. According to Sarbin (1954), functional adaptation to a social system is highly related to veridicality of role perception.

Are these hypotheses, which one can subscribe to as reasonable propositions, merely re-statements of a single theorem? If not, to what extent do they overlap, and how are they related to one another? What is a "minimum" of consensus? Is "consensus" the same as "objectivity", or how are they related? What is the conceptual meaning of terms like "indefinite", "diffuse", "adjustment to roles", "clarity of definition", "functional adaptation", and "veridicality of role perception"? When Sarbin (1954) says, for example, that role expectations may be "partly unknown or unknowable", is he referring to the accuracy of perception, to the clarity of definition of role expectations, to the structure of the situation, or to all of these?

In the following sections an attempt will be made to formulate such terms and hypotheses within the concepts and indices of the Return Potential Model. Some of the complex issues arising from the quest

for increased specification of meaning will be considered, although clearly the problems will require more extensive treatment than can be provided within the limits of the present work. It also seems to be inevitable that some of the richness of meaning of our favorite generalizations is lost when they are translated into an operational model. In part the loss may be illusory; in part it might be compensated for by additional and unexpected meanings and problems that emerge.

The hypothesis quoted above from Cottrell, that adjustment to roles depends upon the clarity with which they are defined, appears to be a generic proposition. As an illustration of our approach, we shall attempt to explore the significance of this theoretical statement and to co-ordinate the emergent questions to the terms of the Return Potential Model. First, the antecedent condition, or independent variable, will be dealt with. What does it mean to say that a role is defined clearly? In terms of the model it will be seen that this is not a single question, but an area of empirical investigation that encompasses a considerable number of questions.

#### Clarity of Roles

One can distinguish between the characteristics of a role and the characteristics of an Actor who plays the role, or perceives the role. Thus, two major questions are involved in the clarity of definition of a role: 1) How accurately is the role perceived? 2) How integrated is the role? These questions must be dealt with in analytical separation.

Perception can be formulated as a process involving a relationship between a perceiver-in-situation and an object-in-context.



Although each part of the process in any concrete instance is interdependent with every other part, it is useful to analyze the structures separately. Thus, characteristics of the role as object will be dealt with apart from the attributes of a role incumbent as perceiver and from the structure of a situation as context.

In approaching the problem of the organization of component norms into a system called a role, it is assumed that the role is not a mere aggregate of diverse norms. The term system implies some degree of organization among components. Words such as integration, compatibility, conflict, and dissonance come to mind. The term integration will be used here as a generic concept referring to the degree of organization or fit among component norms, and also in regard to the organization of roles in a social system.

#### Adjustment to Roles

The consequent condition, or dependent variable in Cottrell's hypothesis, is adjustment to a role. Here, too, a number of different questions are involved, both of meaning and of postulated processes. One can distinguish between acceptance of a role -- that is, acquiescing in the role expectations and considering them to be legitimate -- and performing the role, which involves behaving in accordance with expectations. Even though an Actor perceives the role expectations accurately, for example, he may be more or less willing to accept them.

Apart from the Actor's acceptance or rejection of a role, his performance can be isolated for separate consideration. As with any social behavior, role behavior depends upon attributes of the person, the task, other persons, and the total situation. Thus, it will be

necessary to consider the skills required in role behavior, and questions both of technology and of social system organization.

Failure to accept a role, or to perform adequately in a role, often can be traced to role conflict. This general concept must be recognized as encompassing a complex of problems, too, rather than a single issue. It can refer to almost every facet of role theory -- the internal organization of a norm-system, the organization of roles in a social system, the compatibility of roles that a single incumbent is expected to play, and to other types of conflict.

A consideration of role conflict and multiple role expectations and pressures leads to many problems in the area of reference group behavior. Why, for example, does a person accept the role expectations of one set of Others in preference to another?

A problem that cuts across many of those mentioned is that of the relationship between role and self. Much of role theory has been concerned with the implications of roles and role taking for the development of the self. Conversely, there has been speculation about the types of selfs, or self-systems, that are more or less capable of playing particular roles.

Finally, since role is such a central concept for social psychology, referring, as it appears, to so many of the phenomena and processes included in this discipline, it is not surprising that an attempt to deal systematically with role theory leads into a consideration of social structure and the values of a society. The model appears to have some preliminary usefulness for formulating and investigating problems in this area.

### Clarity of Roles

#### Accuracy of Perceiving Roles

In discussing accuracy of perception -- using the expression loosely to include judgmental processes, a common useage in social psychology -- attention must be given to characteristics of the perceiver, characteristics of the object, and characteristics of the process by which the person perceives the object. The primary focus here will be on the characteristics of a norm-system that can be hypothesized to increase or to decrease its clarity as a perceptual object. Since an analysis of the perceptual process cannot ignore the perceiver or the situation, however, these will be considered briefly.

##### 1. Characteristics of the perceiver

Much of the extensive research in social perception has been directed toward understanding the attributes of the perceiver, from the early demonstrations that motivational states influence resultant percepts (Levine, Chein, & Murphy 1942; McClelland & Atkinson 1948), to more recent studies of the empathy or social sensitivity of a person, measured by his ability to judge other persons or objects accurately (Dymond 1950; Gage 1953). It is a common assumption in the field of mental illness that "sick" persons do not perceive their social environment veridically because of certain personal attributes that are manifestations of their "disease". Recent thinking and research in this area, influenced by the inter-personal formulations of Sullivan (1947), are giving at least equal weight to the social situation and social objects that are being perceived (Greenblatt, Levinson & Williams 1957).

Sullivan's concept of parataxic distortion represents an excellent insight into the process of perceiving roles, since implicit in its definition is the assumption that the perceiver's past history of relationships with significant figures, as represented in his personality, interacts with the relationship between Actor and Other in an immediate action situation to produce the resultant perception.

In addition to personality attributes -- using the term to refer to the persistent, historically-based dynamic system of motivational, affective, and cognitive processes -- one would expect that more immediate experience should facilitate an individual's ability to perceive others' role expectations more accurately. A simple, general hypothesis would be that the greater the amount of information the Actor previously had obtained regarding Others, the type of activity involved, and in general, the social system in which a role is located, the greater his accuracy of perceiving it.

The sheer amount of information, obviously, would not be as good a predictor of a person's accuracy in perceiving roles as would his cognitive organization -- what he has done with the information. Thus, we need a conceptualization of cognitive structure, such as that of Zajonc's (1954, 1960), in order to hypothesize effectively about a person's ability to perceive roles veridically. Ultimately, terms like "empathy" and "social sensitivity" should be replaced by such a theoretical development.

## 2. Characteristics of the object

A significant determinant of any perceptual process is the degree and type of organization of the object being perceived. What must be

understood in the investigation of accuracy of perceiving roles is a relational process between two structures, the cognitive structure of the perceiver and the structure of the object, in this case a norm-system or role. Terms such as "lack of specificity" and "definiteness" are used by Sarbin (1954), for example, who says that they lead to "discontinuities in expectations". It would appear that the referents to these terms are characteristics of the norm-system, and require some specification of its structure.

A norm-system can be examined in terms of its internal structure, and also in terms of its external relations to other systems. Thus, it will be necessary to examine the characteristics of the component norms and their integration into a system, but also the relations among roles and their integration into a social system.

Previously we discussed the problem of selecting the set of behavior dimensions that constitute a norm-system for a particular position. We suggested that an inductive approach to the problem might include all those behaviors of Actor that Others feel strongly about. The index of intensity was proposed for this task, with an arbitrary cut-off point established by the investigator. It would be possible thus to obtain a set of norms about the behavior of an Actor. How would one determine the degree to which these constitute a norm-system, that is, the degree of integration of the role? At the present time we have no solution to this problem, although there are a number of characteristics of the Return Potential Model that offer some possibilities.

The amount of consensus among relevant Others for a specific Actor

and behavior dimension is expressed by an index of crystallization, as previously discussed. The average crystallization for all of the behaviors in a norm-system would represent Others' consensus about the Actor's role. Although this does not cope with the problem of organization, it does appear to be one criterion of internal integration.

Another requirement of an integrated role is that it permits the incumbent to maintain consistent relationships with other members of the social system. If an Actor's behavior was required by the expectations to vary greatly when switching from one behavior dimension to another in his relations to particular categories of Others, this would impose strain on his personality system, which could be viewed as arising from a lack of integration of his role.

In the study of norms about authoritative behavior (Jackson 1962b), the point of maximum return indicates whether, for example, providing alternative suggestions to a superior, making recommendations, formulating tentative solutions, or merely conveying information, represents the most approved behavior in a problematic situation. A well-integrated role conceivably should permit the Actor to adopt consistent behavior across many problem situations in relating to his superior. Thus, the variability in the point of maximum return provides an index of the internal integration for the part of the role that concerns authority relations. A similar approach is possible in studying other types of relationships, such as communicative and expressive. One advantage of the deductive approach to the selection of behavior dimensions is that the initial criteria will specify which relationships must be included within the norm-system.

As one moves into this problem area, new questions will of course arise. The variation in situations, for example, will generate variable expectations for Actor: it will be highly appropriate for him to make recommendations to his superior in certain circumstances, but highly inappropriate in others. As long as high consensus exists among the members of the system, would this variability in expectations constitute poor integration of Actor's role? This question suggests that, in order to have highly integrated norm-systems, the social system must provide some criteria for categorizing and ranking situations, generated perhaps by superordinate values. We shall return to this problem and its implications for the internal integration of a role, after discussing external integration among roles.

Many of the proposals for measuring the internal integration of a norm-system apply equally well to the integration among roles -- the integration of the social system. Another criterion in terms of which the degree of integration among roles can be expressed is functional. It assumes that each position in a social system is justified in terms of the function it performs -- that is, the contribution it makes to the goals or to the maintenance of the system. Thus, a policeman is supposed to make a contribution to public safety, and a teacher to increasing the knowledge of students. (To simplify the problem, we do not consider here the difficulties that arise from the fact that functions are multiple for positions, and change over time.) Once a function of a particular position has been identified, the corresponding role can be considered to be functionally integrated to the degree that the component norms steer the Actor's behavior in the direction of the appropriate goals or in the

maintenance of relevant values. It should be emphasized that we are not assuming that there is a simple correspondence between the characteristics of a norm or role, and the resultant behavior of an incumbent. We merely deal analytically with hypothesized forces generated by a norm or norm-system, "other things being equal".

Earlier, the question of norm-ness, or the degree of normative regulation, was discussed. A suggested resolution of this problem was stated in terms of the crystallization and the intensity of the return potential curve. To the degree that crystallization and intensity are both high, univocal forces or influences should be generated to "push" Actor's behavior in the system-valued direction. Other characteristics of the curve also should have relevance here. The narrower the range of tolerable behavior, for example, the more focussed will be the forces that impinge upon the Actor.

The speculations in this section obviously represent only a beginning at systematic consideration of the problems of role integration. Some related questions are discussed later in the chapter under role conflict.

### 3. Characteristics of the situation

An analysis of the process of perceiving roles must also take into consideration the effect of the object's context -- the total situation in which the process occurs. It should be appreciated that we are dealing here only with an analogy between a person perceiving an object in the context of a situation, and an Actor "cognizing" a norm-system constituted by Others' role expectations in the action situation generated by a social system. It would be an error to carry the analogy too far and



to assume that principles formulated to account for perceptual processes in the laboratory necessarily apply to the process of "perceiving" roles. The parallel is useful, however, to point to the possibility that changes in social situations, or in social structures, may significantly affect the perception of roles.

In terms of the present model, to be accurate about a role an Actor would have to assess correctly the potential return from Others for each alternative act, for the total system of component norms. But Others vary in the volume and clarity of the cues that they provide about their feelings. In some situations, even though people feel strongly and have high consensus, they tend to suppress any manifestations of their feelings. The process of providing cues about feelings itself is normatively regulated, and varies from one social system to another, and from one situation to another. Thus, it will be easier or more difficult for Actors to perceive their roles accurately, depending upon the situation.

Another situational determinant of accurate role perception is the Actor's position in social structure, since it invariably affects the volume and type of information available to him. In a study of the role of "service representatives" in the telephone company, for example, it was found that accuracy of perceiving the norms regulating the behavior of role-incumbents was related to their position in the informal communication structure (Jackson & Butman 1956).

Accuracy in perceiving roles depends in general upon the degree to which a situation and a social system provide opportunities for learning about the roles. In terms of the Return Potential Model, this would

mean opportunities for learning about Others' feelings of approval and disapproval for alternative role behaviors.

#### 4. Measurement of accuracy of perceiving roles

Most of the attempts to study social accuracy have foundered upon Cronbach's (1955, 1958) devastating methodological criticism. He points out that the measures used for "empathy", "social sensitivity" and similar ideas have combined indiscriminately a number of different components of accuracy; and that many of the findings, in any case, are merely artifacts of the methods of analysis employed. The typical accuracy measure, which Cronbach calls Total Accuracy, is decomposed by him into four components. (Three of these can be further subdivided.) Two of these components, Elevation and Differential Elevation, refer to a perceiver's accuracy in judging the amount of agreement he has with the object-person in utilizing the instrument or scales. This agreement may be a mere coincidence, and therefore provides little if any information about the relevant attributes of either the Actor or the situation. The other two components, Stereotype Accuracy and Differential Accuracy, measure the perceiver's ability to judge correctly how Others respond to specific items, and how particular Others respond to particular items differentially.

Bronfenbrenner was the first to recognize the Stereotype Accuracy component, which he said was a measure of taking the role of the generalized other (1954). It has been possible to obtain a rather pure measure of this concept utilizing the Return Potential Model, by asking the respondent to signify how he thinks Others would feel in given hypothetical situations (Jackson 1956a). Because of the nature of the model, the

Elevation component tends to be negligible; by asking the question with regard to collective "Others" -- any others who are seen by a respondent to be relevant to the situation -- the two differential components are not available.

Since Mead's concept of the generalized other is so intimately related to role theory, it will be discussed further in the following section, in relation to a consideration of problems of adjustment to roles.

#### Adjustment to Roles

Thus far we have been discussing the first part of Cottrell's hypothesis that the clarity of definition of roles will determine the degree of adjustment to them. We have suggested that many different considerations enter into determining the clarity of a role, involving attributes of the role incumbent as perceiver, the structural characteristics of the role and component norms, and the structure of the social system in which the role is located.

It will not be surprising, perhaps, to find that the term "adjustment to a role" similarly encompasses a broad spectrum of problems, such as acceptance of a role; role performance and the resources required for adequate role behavior; self-esteem, guilt, and anxiety as related to role acceptance and role performance; the selection and effects of reference groups; and the social structure and values of social systems. Clearly, for the present purposes the treatment must be programmatic rather than comprehensive.

### Acceptance of a Role

#### 1. Conventionality or dissidence

Adjustment to a role sometimes is evaluated in terms of the behavior of the incumbent, but there are a number of reasons why role performance is an inadequate criterion. The distinction between overt and covert behavior in response to others' demands has been recognized by students of social influence processes (Festinger 1953; Kelman 1956). A person may conform to expectations although at the same time he denies their legitimacy. Under such conditions he will seek an opportunity to avoid the induction, by being secretive and avoiding observation, by leaving the social system if possible, or by decreasing his desire for membership and his investment of energy in the system's objectives. In such a case one might find that an Actor produces the appropriate role behavior, but does not accept his role.

Acceptance of role expectations can occur, however, without the Actor being able to produce the ideal, or even adequate performance. Under conditions of high acceptance of his role, one might expect increased effort by Actor to improve his performance in the direction of satisfying Others' expectations. Thus, acceptance of a role appears to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for adjustment to a role. Learning the expectations of others is involved in adjustment, but also attributing legitimacy to those expectations. There is a distinction between knowing what others expect, and making those expectations one's own -- what is referred to often as "internalizing" them. This process is represented in recent theories about conformity, such as those of Kelman (1956) and Jahoda (1959).

In any situation that involves multiple group orientations, an Actor may accept the norms of the larger social system in which his position is located, those of a sub-group within the system, or those of some other system. His adjustment to his role is dependent in part upon his acceptance of particular norms rather than others. Thus, related to the question of adjustment to a role is an understanding of the conditions under which various reference groups are selected and are effective in influencing a person's acceptance of a norm-system. Examples from research utilizing the Return Potential Model will illustrate how such a problem can be investigated.

In the Townwood study (Jackson 1956a), the concept of dissidence was used to describe the degree to which an employee's conception of her role departed from that of the supervisory staff. Two return potential curves were obtained for each hypothetical situation, one based on an employee's own feelings of approval and disapproval for alternative acts of an hypothetical other employee, the other based on the means of supervisors' similar feelings. The discrepancies between points on these two curves, squared and summed, provided the index of dissidence. In the two offices studied, it was found that there was little over-all discrepancy, across a large number of role-relevant situations, between the employees' conception of their role, and the supervisors' conception. There was considerable variability in dissidence among employees, however, which was related to certain aspects of role performance.

In the study of authority structure in a mental hospital system (Jackson 1962b), it is possible to compare the norms of a Central Office executive and administrative group with those of the four mental hospital

staffs, and to determine the degree of congruence (Jackson 1960). Similarly, one can measure the congruence of norms about authoritative behavior for a particular Actor between any two role groups, or between a role group and the top administrative staff in a hospital. One can compare, too, the approval-disapproval feelings of any member of a system with the return potential curve of his own role group, other role groups, the top administrative group, or the total system, and discover with which group his norms have the greatest correspondence (Jackson 1960).

These are approaches to identifying the group whose norms the Actor accepts. Clearly, before concluding that he has selected that group as a reference group and has been influenced by its norms, one would have to conduct controlled experiments, rather than cross-sectional studies. The model does provide quite flexible tools for investigating such questions.

## 2. The generalized other

The preceding discussion also can be considered in the light of the concept the generalized other. When an Actor can organize the attitudes of those in other positions in relation to his own, and is able to take this attitude toward himself, this generalized system of attitudes is called by Mead the "generalized other" (Strauss 1956). The distinction between knowledge of a role and acceptance of a role pointed out in the preceding section would imply that there is a difference between knowing the role of the generalized other, and taking the role of the generalized other. Investigation of the former might utilize measures of perceptual

accuracy, as discussed previously; the latter might be studied with measures of dissidence and correspondence of norms.

Some writers say that the concept of the generalized other is too broad (Mills 1939); others maintain that it is only an abstract moral standard and does not refer to any actual group of people -- just people in general (Lindesmith & Strauss 1956). How it is defined, of course, is entirely up to the investigator who believes he can make it into a useful conceptual tool. It is possible, however, utilizing the present model, to generate empirical questions from Mead's conception, such as: "When an Actor judges the return potential curves of Others, which group of Others has been most influential in affecting his estimates? Which are the groups and persons who have had the greatest impact on the Actor's own feelings of approval and disapproval?" Such questions are compatible with Strauss's observation that since each person participates in a different set of groups, his "generalized other" or "me" will be different (Strauss 1956).

Lindesmith and Strauss (1956) point out that taking the role of the generalized other requires synthesizing "divergent and conflicting views" into an over-all harmonious one. This is akin to Merton's (1957) discussion of learning the medical role: learning how to behave so that divergent expectations are reconciled. Different generalized others are possible in different situations, depending upon the compatibility of approved behaviors, or amount of role conflict that exists.

### 3. Role conflict

Role conflict has been a focal area of investigation in role theory. It is possible to distinguish a number of different types of role conflict

and compatibility in terms of the Return Potential Model. The analysis begins with a single norm (norm conflict), but will be generalized to a norm-system. The various types of conflict distinguished, together with relevant theories of motivation, should lead to different predictions regarding role conflict resolution, depending upon the values of the structural characteristics of the component norms and their integration in the norm-system.

Regarding any given norm, we can identify at least three types of conflict: approach-avoidance, where for a specific behavior alternative, the potential return from one or more Others is positive, but the potential return from a different set of Others is negative. Sometimes the Actor will find himself in a situation where, no matter how he behaves along the behavior dimension, he potentially can receive strongly negative return. Thus, he is in an avoidance-avoidance conflict situation. Similarly, the Actor may be attempting to maximize return from Others, but the point of maximum return may vary widely for two or more sets of significant Others. The Actor is thus in an approach-approach conflict situation.

Clearly, these are simple types of conflict that can become much more complex. Role behavior with respect to any single norm might involve multiple approach-avoidance, approach-approach, and avoidance-avoidance conflicts. A detailed consideration of the return potential curves for the Others of a system, a knowledge of their differential significance for the Actor, and an understanding of his motives that make some types of conflict more salient for him than others, would be required to specify the type of conflict he is facing.



It can be hypothesized that when crystallization is low, intensity is high, and the range of tolerable behavior is narrow, that conflict in that normative area will be maximized. When there is high ambiguity of norms (Jackson 1960), too, some Actors will undoubtedly experience severe role conflict.

Since behavior does not come in discrete dimensions, however, but in patterned sequences of acts, the Actor sometimes will be in a situation where it is difficult to produce a highly approved act, without at the same time behaving in an undesirable way. This will depend upon the degree of integration of component norms in the role, but also upon the resources available to him. An ideally organized role would be structured so that it would be possible for the incumbent to receive only positive return for his acts.

Even if a role be well integrated, there is what Sarbin (1954) has called role-role conflict. This refers to a situation in which an Actor potentially can obtain positive return for his acts relative to one of his positions, but the same acts have relevance for one or more other positions that he occupies, and evoke potential negative return. In terms of the Return Potential Model, this is what Sarbin means by the role expectations of two positions being "incompatible". The types of conflict in such a predicament are apparent: when an Actor can obtain reward from one set of Others but can suffer punishment from another set for the same acts (approach-avoidance); when the different Others each highly approve different acts, both of which cannot be performed (approach-approach); or when either of two available acts is highly disapproved by one of the sets of Others (avoidance-avoidance).

The problem of conflict between self and role has been referred to frequently in the literature. A clearer specification of this problem would seem to depend upon the conceptual definition of self as a system, in relation to role as a norm-system. One approach might be to consider the self to be an Other, and to draw the return potential curve of the self. This, in fact, was done in the Townwood Study (Jackson 1956a), where an attempt was made to determine where an individual's role behavior fell upon his own return potential curve -- that is, whether he approved or disapproved his own role performance.

This is not an adequate solution, for a number of reasons. First, a person may have a curve of approval-disapproval tendencies for Others' behavior that is different from his curve for his own behavior -- even though the Others occupy the same position that he does, for example, all "service representatives". Second, the self may be equivalent to a number of different Actors with divergent return potential curves, rather than to an individual Actor. Thus, many of the problems discussed previously regarding integration of a norm-system might apply equally well to the integration of a self-system. Self-role conflict could be formulated as a special case of role conflict and conceptualized within the same model.

#### Role Performance

##### 1. Personal skills and attributes

It is possible for an Actor to perceive the role expectations of Others accurately, to accept the role, but not to perform appropriately. There are a number of conditions that must be taken into consideration in understanding the role performance of an Actor.

According to Coutu (1951), before a person can play a role he must have skill in taking a role, that is, in imaginatively taking the attitudes of the others with whom he is interacting. It is likely that some persons, because of earlier and more varied social experience, have more general skill in role-taking than do others. Such an assumption is central to the Cummings' theory of the ego as related to the milieu, in the treatment of social deviancy (Cumming & Cumming 1962). Although social sensitivity or empathy might be a factor in such skill, it is not a sufficient attribute. The above authors, in fact, propose that the over-empathic member of a treatment team might not be the most effective. Role-taking skill also involves intellectual and motoric abilities, as well as flexibility in being able to change from one role to another.

## 2. Other resources required

The resources required for an Actor to perform appropriately in a role -- that is, to behave within the ranges of tolerable behavior of the component norms -- are not, however, all attributes of himself as a person. The issues discussed previously, such as the structural characteristics of component norms, the integration of the norm-system, and the integration among the roles of the social system, all can affect significantly his ability to perform.

Whether there is conflict or incompatibility among behaviors that are maximally approved depends, too, upon the state of technology in the action situation. Thus, some behaviors could be performed in a "rich" physical environment that would be impossible in an impoverished one. The invention of tools, machines, and communication devices, for

example, permits an Actor "to be in two places at the same time", and thus to avoid role conflict.

An additional factor that affects the performance of a role is the total social system and its organization. Perhaps this is another way of recognizing that the organization of the role is relevant in determining whether or not an Actor conforms or deviates from any single component norm. In one study (Jackson & Butman 1956), for example, there were norms at higher levels of the supervisory hierarchy that influenced the communication system, which in turn influenced norms about lower-level employees helping one another. And these, in turn, were related to whether or not an employee's role performance was within the approved range. A conception of the total social system as affecting any individual act of role performance implies, as March and Simon suggest (1958), that the organization of a social system should be included as an important element of its technology.

### 3. General and specific roles

One of the recurrent questions in role theory that is related to role performance is whether roles are general or specific. A hypothesis is offered by Newcomb (1950), for example, that all persons who occupy a given position will resemble one another in their interaction patterns. Such an hypothesis can be formulated within the Return Potential Model, but requires somewhat greater specification. Assuming that the return potential curves for a particular position do not vary with different incumbents, then how similar must their role behavior be? Could one predict, perhaps, that there will be greater variability in role performance among occupants of different positions than among occupants of the same position?

In the study of authority behavior referred to previously (Jackson 1962b), we asked questions such as, "Is there a general system norm for behaving authoritatively, a hospital-wide norm, or a role-group norm? What are the structural characteristics of norms based on these various groups?" For some functional areas of problems there appears to be a system norm; sometimes there are different hospital norms, and frequently norms for role groups are different, on any particular behavior dimension. Thus, whether or not the hypothesis that roles are general is supported depends upon whether a position, such as Medical Doctor, and its corresponding role, is defined in terms of the most inclusive or the least inclusive social system. There may not be a system-wide norm for M.D.s, but the norms within one of the hospitals may be highly crystallized for this group, and different from the norms of other role groups in the same hospital. From the perspective of the mental health system, the role for M.D.s is specific rather than general; but from the perspective of the hospital, one could say that there is a general role for doctors.

#### Role and Self

Role theory, from the time of Mead, has been involved in discussions of the relation between role and self. In a previous section of this chapter, we proposed a possible formulation of the problem of self-role conflict. Sarbin (1954) asks what happens to self and role when an Actor is in a situation where expectations call for performances incongruent with his self-concept. In the research that has been done with the Return Potential Model, the focus has been on the conceptual properties and empirical relations of norms and roles, with little attention given to the conceptual definition of self as a system.

Recently, a theory of the ego as a system has been proposed (Cumming & Cumming 1962) which seems to offer great possibilities for answering Sarbin's question, in conjunction with the present formulation of role as a norm-system.

The present model stimulates a number of questions about the relations between role and self. For example, is the self a system of perceptions by a person of how he has behaved, habitually behaves, and will or can behave in various situations? Since each of his acts potentially or actually evokes a certain value of return from Others, his concept of self may be a highly approved one, a highly disapproved one, or ambivalent.

Sarbin theorizes about the relationship between various personality types, such as psychopath, and their ability to take roles (1954). One might also conjecture about the ability of certain types to play roles; this would depend as much upon the organization of the roles, as discussed earlier, as upon personal attributes. Considering the implications of our discussion of integration and conflict, it seems clear that some processes of normative regulation would be more threatening, punitive, and frustrating than others. Some types of personalities or self-systems might be able to function well in situations with a particular kind of normative structure and regulation, but might be utterly incompetent in others. Thus, the state of a person's self-system would be highly dependent upon the state of the social system or systems in which he was an Actor.

Linton is quoted by Newcomb (1950) as follows: "He takes the bait of immediate satisfaction and is caught upon the hook of socialization".

Although this implies some such model as the present one, since Actor is seen to be behaving in order to obtain approval, and is thus steered by social system norms and goals, it is perhaps too behavioristic or mechanical a conception. It raises the question as to whether the approved behavior is intrinsically satisfying to Actor's needs; there may be various degrees of fit between role and self.

One can talk about Actor's ideal self -- in terms of the model, all the points of maximum return, all the ideal behaviors that he perceives that Others would maximally approve. Actor's return potential curves for his own behavior as well as for Others would also have to be examined. Discrepancies among these might yield indices of self-esteem, and perhaps, inferentially, of guilt and anxiety. This has been the direction of some of the systematic research on the self, but a great deal of work is required to strengthen the conceptual and measurement model.

#### Roles and Social Structure

One of the questions that has been under discussion since the beginning of interest in society is, "How organized are social structures?" According to Strauss (1956), Mead thought of them as "somewhat less organized than most sociologists and anthropologists". This question can be investigated systematically, once we have decided what we mean by organized, and what particular characteristics of integration or organization should be the focus of research. It is apparent that no general statement will suffice to describe all societies and social systems, or all dimensions of social structure. What is required is much systematic study, on a comparative basis -- which implies a standard

conceptual and measurement model -- of the social structures of many different varieties of systems.

It has been pointed out by Lindesmith & Strauss (1956) that general roles are prescribed by the dominant values and ideals of a society. They assume a functionalist position with respect to the emergence of norms and roles. The position runs into difficulties, of course, because social systems are not perfectly integrated with respect to values, ideals, goals, or means. Investigations must be conducted to determine the degrees of integration; various norms and roles must be specified in detail, in an attempt to understand from which values and goals they have been derived, or whether particular roles are traditional and do not fit current values and goals.

The Return Potential Model may be a useful tool for exploring the functions of different kinds of positions, and ultimately the values and goals of a social system. It is possible to ask, and to obtain systematic empirical answers to questions such as: "Are roles in this social system different for achieved and ascribed positions? In which way do the norm-systems differ?"

In our consideration of a general hypothesis from role theory, that clearly defined roles are necessary for role adjustment, we have been led to consider problems which range from self to society. Much of the discussion has been highly speculative, although interlaced with reference to studies that have been conducted with the Return Potential Model, or are in progress. It is hoped that some of the possibilities for achieving increased coherence and precision in research on norms and roles have been suggested, and some questions raised that will be deemed suitable for investigation.



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